DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 189 CS 208 924

AUTHOR Kelly, James D.
TITLE A Content Analysis of Foreign Correspondent Reports from Nicaragua and El Salvador.
PUB DATE Aug 85
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (68th, Memphis, TN, August 3-6, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bias; Content Analysis; Developing Nations; *Foreign Countries; Journalism; *Media Research; *Newspapers; *News Reporting
IDENTIFIERS El Salvador; *Foreign News Correspondents; Los Angeles Times; *News Perspective Bias; New York Times; Nicaragua

ABSTRACT

Critics of international news flow characteristics have charged that news is biased toward the interests of the developed world and against the developing world, thereby giving an unrepresentative image of their countries to the United States reader. A study was conducted to examine the output and presentation of reports by foreign correspondents in Nicaragua and El Salvador, both those working for transnational news agencies and those working for specific newspapers, in one month each of the "New York Times" and the "Los Angeles Times." A content analysis was made to determine findings on the length and number of reports, their location in the paper, the nationality of the main actor in each report and whether the report was mainly about conflict, reconciliation, or some other topic. The hypothesis was that El Salvador would be represented more favorably than Nicaragua because the government of El Salvador is supported by the U. S. government while the government of Nicaragua is not. Findings indicated the bias was subtle but nevertheless present. (Tables of findings are appended.) (Author/DF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED258189

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

International Division

Markham Competition

A Content Analysis of Foreign Correspondent Reports from Nicaragua and El Salvador

James D. Kelly

School of Journalism

Indiana University

Bloomington, IN 47405

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James D. Kelly

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 208 924

ABSTRACT

A Content Analysis of Foreign Correspondent Reports from Nicaragua and El Salvador

Critics of international news flow have charged that Western news systems present an unrepresentative image of their countries. This study examines the content of foreign correspondents' reports from Nicaragua and El Salvador to determine whether U.S. government foreign policy influences the type of coverage these countries receive.

ABSTRACT

A Content Analysis of Foreign Correspondent Reports from Nicaragua and El Salvador

The flow of information from foreign places to the readers of U.S. newspapers begins with the observations of foreign correspondents. To a large extent, these reports form the image a reader has of other countries and influence his opinions on the U.S. government's foreign policy. Critics of international news flow characteristics have charged that news is biased toward the interests of the developed world and against the developing world, thereby giving an unrepresentative image of their countries to the U.S reader

This study examines the output and presentation of reports by foreign correspondents in Nicaragua and El Salvador, both those working for transnational news agencies and for specific newspapers, in one month each of the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. A content analysis was made to determine findings on the length and number of reports, their location in the paper, the nationality of the main actor in each report and whether the report was mainly about conflict, reconciliation or some other topic.

The hypothesis was that El Salvador would be represented more favorably than Nicaragua because the government of El Salvador is supported by the U.S. government while the government of Nicaragua is not. Findings indicated the bias was subtle but nevertheless present.

A Content Analysis of Foreign Correspondent Reports from Nicaragua and El Salvador

Numerous studies during the last three decades suggest a relationship between the international flow of news and its influence on international politics. In a democracy, the government's foreign policy is in part influenced by the opinions held by individual members of society. And much of the impression individuals have of foreign countries is based on what they read in the mass media. But what are the characteristics of this international flow of news in the mass media? What determines whether an event is worthy of a news story? How and by whom is this news collected and from where and to whom does it flow?

These questions have been addressed by many mass communication researchers. The answers are far from conclusive but certain possible clues have been revealed. Research by the International Press Institute[1] in 1953 and by Hart[2] in 1966 suggested news does not flow evenly between regions of the world nor do newspapers in different regions publish foreign news in the same proportions. Gerbner and Marvanyi's[3] 1977 Study indicated that individual regions present various views of the world to their readers according to such factors as geographical proximity, East-West bloc relationships, established communication channels and political alignments. Not all countries see the world from the same perspective.

Galtung and Ruge's[4] landmark study on international news flow, later expanded by Sande,[5] indicated much of foreign news is crisis oriented. This crisis orientation is especially evident in coverage of developing countries in the newspapers of the developed world. The significance of crisis in news selection was recently explored again by Sreberny-Mohammadi,[6] whose research confirmed a strong emphasis on crisis reporting in the developing regions. Most of the news concerned diplomatic and political occurrences in the developed world. Crisis was covered wherever it happened but this type of reporting was a far greater percentage of developing country coverage than it was of the coverage of developed countries.

Most international news is collected and disseminated by the huge transnational news agencies of the developed world and mainly concerns events in the developed countries of the northern hemisphere.[7] The New World Information Order debate put into motion a new set of concerns about how international news is collected and disseminated. Mustapha Masmoudi, permanent delegate to UNESCO from Tunisia, declared, "the criteria governing selection are consciously or unconsciously based on the political and economic interests of the transnational system and of the countries in which this system is established."[8] He and other representatives of developing countries have urged the transnationals to pay more attention to the development of their countries, reporting positive achievements as well as negative developments.

Nearly 25 years ago, James Markham remarked that it took a revolution to get Latin America into the news.[9] This statement in his 1961 study of Latin American news in the U.S. newspapers may not have been entirely accurate but it does contain a grain of truth. Latin America was barely

visible in the Gerbner and Marvanyi[10] "Many Worlds" study, accounting for barely six percent of the coverage. More recently, revolutions have occurred in Latin America and U.S. newspapers have increased their coverage dramatically. The present study focuses on the coverage of Nicaragua and El Salvador, two countries involved in revolution. A few previous studies which have examined coverage of Latin America are useful as context for this research.

Several impressionistic studies have criticized the amount and type of coverage given to the region by the transnationals and major U.S. newspapers. Among them are studies by Hendrix,[11] and Raymont,[12] both in 1962, and Hamilton in 1977.[13] Their concerns were examined in research by Hester[14] and others. They revealed that, as in much of the developing world, Latin American reports are primarily about crisis, usually revolutions, natural disasters and political upheavals. They noted a gatekeeper effect exercised by wire and newspaper editors. This effect may be influenced by foreign policy considerations of the government in which news providers are established. Davison[15] interviewed a number of foreign correspondents and implied that government policy and diplomacy may be determinants of what foreign news is printed. This contention was given further support in research by Lynch and Effendi[16] who showed that newspaper coverage of a foreign country increased as its diplomatic relations with the U.S. improved.

Indications are that the actions of the U.S. government, sometimes directly but more often indirectly, exert influence on newspaper gatekeepers that ultimately affects the images of foreign countries in the pages of the U.S. newspapers.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to isolate that part of a foreign country's image created by the reporters in closest contact with actual events in that country -- the foreign correspondents -- and to determine whether their part of the image conforms to the U.S. government's foreign policy toward that country. The foreign correspondent not only has first-hand knowledge of a foreign country's events, he or she is also less likely to be influenced by his or her home country's government policy because he or she is outside the country.

The study focuses on the Central American countries of Nicaragua and El Salvador, both of political importance to the U.S. and both involved in revolution. Although these countries are unrepresentative of the developing world since they have been made major foreign policy subjects by the U.S., the fact that they are both unrepresentative eliminates this as a factor.

The United States is one of -- if not the foremost -- suppliers of information to the world through the Associated Press, United Press International and a number of news services offered by the major elite newspapers. Nicaragua and El Salvador are developing countries without major news agencies and somewhat typical of countries that have expressed concern over the information monopoly of the northern hemisphere.

The basic hypothesis of this study is that the images of Nicaragua and El Salvador created by foreign correspondents from elite U.S. newspapers who report from those two countries will show Nicaragua as more conflict-oriented toward reconciliation and adversaries than Nicaragua. These

images will conform to the foreign policy statements on these two countries by the White House and the U.S. State Department.

METHOD

The primary method is a content analysis of four weeks each of the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times.[17] These papers were selected because of their large general circulations, their geographic distance (one on either coast of the country) and their sponsorship of foreign bureaus in the region. The latest national editions of each paper were coded. These editions were used to assure consistency and greater application to any affect these publications might have on national public opinion.

Nineteen-eighty-three was selected because no elections were being held in either country or the U.S. and the political situation of each country was relatively stable. The sample consisted of two randomly selected consecutive weeks and two randomly constructed weeks in 1983. This sample provided a good indication of the year in total and still gave an insight into the day-to-day flow of news from each country.

Only reports with a dateline from Nicaragua or El Salvador were coded so as to reflect only that part of the image created by foreign correspondents. Sports, entertainment, fashion and Sunday magazine sections were not included because of the failure of these stories to consistently identify the dateline location. Sunday papers were included in the weeks so as not to overlook the ''soft news'' that more frequently finds its way into the weekend papers. Photographs were noted but coded in an abbreviated fashion because of the high degree of subjectivity

involved in interpretation of visual reports. The unit of anlaysis was either a story or photograph in its entirety including headlines and cutlines.

A comparative method of analysis was used to assess the images of the two countries and to a lesser extent, to examine the difference in coverage between the two papers. Coding of the reports examined five primary areas:

1. Was the report mainly about conflict or reconciliation and with or between whom?
2. Who filed the report (staft or news service)?
3. Of what nationality and position were the main actors?
4. How long was each report?
5. Where was the report located in the paper?

The coding scheme used was a modified version of the design used in the International Association for Mass Communication Research, Images of Foreign Countries Project, with the addition of a unit indicating whether the report involved conflict, reconciliation or some unrelated subject. The section in the IAMCR design on themes was omitted because of the specific focus of this study.

FINDINGS

The combined foreign correspondent coverage in Nicaragua and El Salvador by the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times is remarkably even. The amount of coverage in column inches in the two papers combined was nearly equal between the two countries. There was only five percent

more coverage on El Salvador than Nicaragua (555 and 528 column inches respectively). This coverage was in the form of 30 reports on Nicaragua and 36 reports on El Salvador, stories on Nicaragua being slightly longer on average. (See Table 1, a and b.)

There were, however, differences in coverage of the two countries between the two papers. The New York Times printed 24 reports per country but allotted 373 column inches to Nicaragua and only 272 inches to El Salvador. Los Angeles Times coverage leaned the other way. The west coast paper printed twice as many stories on El Salvador as on Nicaragua (12 and 6 respectively) and ran 283 column inches on El Salvador and only 155 inches on Nicaragua. So while each paper tended to emphasize one country more than the other in its coverage, the combined coverage is rather even. How this would be affected by the inclusion of additional elite newspapers will have to wait for further research.

When coded as conflict or reconciliation (calls for peace, negotiations, etc.) in nature, combined coverage of each country was still nearly even, with approxmiately 370 column inches of conflict reports per country, 150 inches of non-conflict (reconciliation and all other) on Nicaragua and 183 inches on El Salvador. The reports about reconciliation only were far fewer in number and amount, accounting for little over seven percent of the total coverage on either country. In a comparison of conflict reports and non-conflict reports in both newspapers, conflict accounts for more than two-thirds of total coverage. (See Table 2, a and b.)

While the amount of total coverage and the amount of coverage of conflict were approximately the same between the two countries, there were some substantive differences. More than half (57 percent) of the reports

on Nicaragua involved relations between states (foreign policy), but less than a third of the reports on El Salvador (28 percent) concerned this area. This may have been due to the amount of reaction Nicaragua made in response to charges by the U.S. of Soviet hegemony in Latin America.

The U.S. was the main actor in far more reports on El Salvador than on Nicaragua. The U.S. was the main actor in seven of the 36 El Salvador reports but in only three of the 30 Nicaragua reports. No other individual states were main actors in any of the reports from the two countries. The number of reports in which the U.S. was the main actor may have been due partially to the presence of U.S. troops in El Salvador.

Foreign correspondents' coverage appeared balanced but the importance attached to their reports by editors in thge U.S. did not. Of the 15 front-page reports centering on conflict in one of the two countries, twice as many were about Nicaragua as were about El Salvador. Of the 18 reports of Nicaragua in conflict, 10 were on the front page while only five of the 20 reports on El Salvador in conflict received such prominence. None of the eight reports concerning either country's moves toward peace made the front page, and only three of 28 of non-conflict reports were given premium display. This suggests that conflict does indeed have greater news value than does non-conflict, at least in the judgment of editors. (See Table 3.)

Of the 10 front-page reports of conflict in Nicaragua, nearly all (90 percent) were by staff reporters. This is also true of the El Salvador reports. Four of the five (80 percent) conflict reports from that country were staff supplied.

Examining the sources of reports in all parts of the newspapers, three-quarters of all conflict reports on Nicaragua were staff produced

but only one-quarter of the El Salvador conflict reports were by staffers. Conflict accounted for 75 percent of the total number of staff reports on Nicaragua but only 35 percent of the total staff production on El Salvador. Though the total number of conflict reports on the two countries is nearly the same, it appears most staff activity in Nicaragua was centered on conflict, while conflict in El Salvador was most often handled by the wire services, perhaps leaving staff reporters time to cover non-conflict events. (See Table 4.)

The length of conflict reports by staff and other sources moderated the difference somewhat, however. Eighty-five percent of the total volume of conflict coverage on Nicaragua was by staff reporters and 60 percent was staff produced on El Salvador. Reports of conflict made up 83 percent of total staff output on Nicaragua and 63 percent on El Salvador. (See Table 5.)

CONCLUSIONS

Though the sample size of 66 items is too small to yield many statistically significant findings, the numbers presented do give an indication of how news coverage by foreign correspondents presents an image of Nicaragua and El Salvador.

The stated hypothesis is only partially supported by these findings, however. In the combined coverage of the New York Times and Los Angeles Times, two of the United States' most prestigious newspapers, Nicaragua and El Salvador appear to receive the same amount of coverage of events involving conflict, reconciliation and other unrelated topics. Neither country is portrayed as more peaceful or belligerent than the other by

foreign correspondent reports. The amount of conflict reported as compared to non-conflict coverage may in part be due to the guerrilla wars being carried out in both countries, but this finding may also support the notion that the transnationals and large U.S. newspapers assign a higher value to crisis than other events.

The difference between coverage of the two countries appears in the form of the prominence reports are given by editors. Reports of conflict in Nicaragua were twice as likely to be placed on the front page as were similar reports from El Salvador. This disparity is possibly due to the fact the U.S. government opposes the government of Nicaragua. The other apparent difference in coverage is the proportion of conflict reports filed by staff members. Foreign correspondents in Nicaragua concentrate more on conflict than do their counterparts in El Salvador. Whether this is a decision made by the correspondents or their editors cannot be determined from the data contained in this study.

These findings do suggest, however, than an expanded study along these same lines might be worthwhile. The difference in coverage between the two sampled newspapers indicates a possible diversity of coverage within elite U.S. newspapers that may be further analyzed in a study examining six or more newspapers.

FOOTNOTES

[1]International Press Institute, ''The Flow of the News,'' Zurich: IPI (1953).

[2]James A. Hart, ''Foreign News in United States and English Daily Newspapers: A Comparison,'' Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 43, (1966), pp. 443-449.

[3]George Gerbner and George Marvanyi, ''The Many Worlds of the World's Press,'' Journal of Communications, Vol. 27(1), (Winter, 1977), pp. 52-66.

[4]Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge, ''The Structure of Foreign News,'' Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 2 (1), (1965).

[5]Oystein Sande, ''The Perception of Foreign News,'' Journal of Peace Research, Vol 8(2), (1971).

[6]Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, ''The 'World of News' Study,'' Journal of Communication, Vol. 33(1), (Winter, 1984), pp. 121-133.

[7]Op. cit., Hart, p. 447.

[8]Mustapha Masmoudi, ''The New World Information Order,'' Journal of Communication, Vol. 29(2), (Spring, 1979), p. 174.

[9]James W. Markham, ''Foreign News in the United States and South American Press,'' Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 25(3), (Summer, 1961), p. 249.

[10]Op. cit., Gerbner, p. 62.

[11]Hal Hendrix, ''The News From Latin America,'' Columbia Journalism Review, (Fall, 1962), pp. 49-60.

[12]Henry Raymont, ''The News on Latin America,'' Nieman Reports, Vol. 16(1), (January, 1962), pp. 3-4.

[13]John Hamilton, ''Ho-hum--Latin America,'' Columbia Journalism Review, (May/June 1977), pp. 9-10.

[14]Albert Hester, ''An Analysis of News Flow From Developed to Developing Nations,'' Gazette, Vol. 17(1), (1971), pp. 29-43 and ''The News From Latin America Via a World News Agency,'' Gazette, Vol. 20(2), (1974), pp. 82-98.

[15]W. Phillips Davison, ''Diplomatic Reporting: Rules of the Game,'' Journal of Communication, Vol. 25(3), (Autumn, 1975), pp.138-146.

[16]Mervin Lynch and Atiya Effendi, ''Editorial Treatment of India in the New York Times,'' Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 41, (Summer, 1964), pp. 430-432.

[17]All coding was done by the author. Nine questions relating to news providers, location in the newspaper, type of report, conflict or non-conflict nature of report and main actors were noted. A reliability test was conducted using a trained coder who coded 10 percent of the 66 reports which resulted in an inter-coder reliability coefficient of .89 using Holsti's formula. See Ole Holsti, Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities, Addison-Wesley: Reading, Mass., p. 137.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chaplin, George,''Latin American News in the U.S. Press,'' Nieman Reports, Vol. 9(1), (January, 1955) pp. 3-5.

Dajani, Nabil and John Donohue, ''A Content Analysis of Six Arab Dailies,'' Gazette, Vol. 19(3), (Fall, 1973), pp. 155-170.

Davison, W. Phillips, ''Diplomatic Reporting: Rules of the Game,'' Journal of Communication, Vol. 25(30), (Autumn, 1975), pp.138-146.

Galtung, Johan, ''A Structural Theory of Imperialism,'' Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 8(2), (Spring, 1971), pp. 81-117.

Galtung, Johan and Mari Holmboe Ruge, ''The Structure of Foreign News,'' Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 2(1), (1965).

Gerbner, George and George Maravanyi, ''The Many Worlds of the World's Press,'' Journal of Communication, Vol. 27(1), (Winter, 1977), pp. 52-66.

Hart, James A., ''Foreign News in the United States and English Daily Newspapers: A Comparison,'' Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 43(2), (Spring, 1966), pp. 443-449.

Hamilton, John,''Ho-hum--Latin America,'' Columbia Journalism Review, (May/June, 1977), pp. 9-10.

Hendrix, Hal, ''The News From Latin America,'' Columbia Journalism Review, (Fall, 1972), pp. 49-60.

Hester, Albert, ''An Analysis of News Flow From Developed to Developing Nations,'' Gazette, Vol. 17(1), (Winter, 1971), pp. 29-43.

Hester, Albert, ''The News From Latin America Via a World News Agency,'' Gazette, Vol. 20(2), (Spring, 1974), pp. 82-98.

International Press Institute, ''The Flow of the News,'' Zurich: IPI, (1953).

Lasswell, Harold D., ''The Politically Significant Context of The Press: Coding Procedures,'' Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 19 (1942), pp. 12-23.

Lent, John A., ''Foreign News in American Media,'' Journal of Communication, Vol. 27(1), (Winter, 1971), pp.56-61.

Lynch, Mervin and Atiya Effendi, ''Editorial Treatment of India in the New York Times,'' Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 41(3), (Summer, 1964), pp. 430-451.

Markham, James, ''Foreign News in the United States and South American Press,'' Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 25(3), (Summer, 1961), pp. 249-261.

Markham, James and Guido H. Stempel, ''An Analysis of Techniques in Measuring Press Performance,'' Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 34(2), (Spring, 1957), pp. 187-190.

Masmoudi, Mustapha, ''The New World Information Order,'' Journal of Communication, Vol. 29(2), (Spring, 1979), pp. 172-185.

Merrill, John C., ''The Image of the United States in Ten Mexican Dailies,'' Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 39(2), (Spring, 1962), pp. 203-209.

Raymont, Henry, ''The News on Latin America,'' Nieman Reports, Vol. 16(1), (January, 1962), pp. 3-4.

Rosenblum, Mort, ''Reporting From the Third World,'' Foreign Affairs, Vol. 55 (July, 1977), pp. 815-836.

Sande, Oystein, ''The Perception of Foreign News,'' Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 8(2), (1971).

Shiller, Herbert, ''Decolonialization of Information: Effects Toward a New World Information Order,'' Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 5 (Winter, 1978), pp. 35-48.

Sreberny-Mohammadi, Annabelle, ''The 'World of News' Study,'' Journal of Communication, Vol. 33(1), (Winter, 1984), pp. 121-133.

Weaver, David and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, ''Foreign News Coverage in Two U.S. Wire Services: A Comparison of Coverage of Less-Developed and More-Developed Countries of the World.''
Paper presented to the 12th General Assembly and Scientific Conference of the International Association for Mass Communication Research, Caracas, Venezuela, (August, 1980).

Wilhoit, G. Cleveland and David Weaver, ''Foreign News Coverage in Major U.S. Wire Services and Small Daily Newspapers.'' Paper presented to the International Association for Mass Communication Research, 13th Scientific Conference, Paris, (1982).

Wolfe, Wayne, ''Images of the United States in the Latin American Press,'' Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 4(1), (Winter, 1964), pp. 79-86.

TABLE 1, a and b

Total Coverage of Each Country by Each Paper

a. column inches

	NYT	LAT	totals
Nicaragua	373	155	528
El Salvador	272	283	555
totals	645	438	

b. number of reports

	NYT	LAT	totals
Nicaragua	24	6	30
El Salvador	24	12	36
totals	48	18	

TABLE 2, a and b

Total Coverage of Each Country According to Conflict, Reconciliation and Other Content

a. column inches

	Conflict	Reconciliation	Other	totals
Nicaragua	378	39	111	528
El Salvador	372	29	154	555

b. number of reports

	Conflict	Reconciliation	Other	totals
Nicaragua	13	5	7	30
El Salvador	20	3	13	36

TABLE 3

Number and Location in Newspaper of
Conflict, Reconciliation, and Other Reports

	Nicaragua		El Salvador	
	Page One	Inside	Page One	Inside
Conflict	10	8	5	15
Reconciliation	0	5	0	3
Other	1	6	2	11

TABLE 4

Number and Source of Conflict,
Reconciliation and Other Reports

	Nicaragua		El Salvador	
	Staff Report	Other Report	Staff Report	Other Report
Conflict	13	5	5	15
Reconciliation	1	4	2	1
Other	3	4	7	6

TABLE 5

Length in Column Inches and Source of Conflict, Reconciliation and Other Reports

	Conflict		Reconciliation		Other Topics	
	Staff Report	Other Report	Staff Report	Other Report	Staff Report	Other Report
Nicaragua	322	55	2	37	61	49
El Salvador	222	152	22	6	107	48